

Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

Indiana

Standardizing Scene Investigations with Dolls

In my county, we have made a Pre-Autopsy Conference standard with every infant death. Investigators sit with the pathologist and discuss circumstances, family history and scene information. We all understand the high importance of these cases and that the autopsy truly begins at the scene. The family and community deserve the best work we can give.

Robert Herr, Coroner
Lawrence County

Public Health Problem (Issue)

During a statewide Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) protocol training effort, Indiana investigators received over four hundred scene re-enactment dolls to help their agencies achieve best practice on the scene of an infant death. SUIDI is a CDC protocol intended to standardize and improve data collected at infant death scenes to help generate accurate identification and classification of cause and manner of death, which is imperative, as the best way to learn how to prevent these tragedies is to find out what causes them. The first time Bedford Police Officer Robert 'Rob' Herr he responded to the scene of an 'infant down,' he knew he wanted it to be the last. As he shared, "One child death is one tragedy too many."

In Indiana, infants die at a higher rate than any other age group. In 2014, 14% of all infant deaths were due to Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID)[\[1\]](#). Understanding the circumstances involved in a SUID will help inform successful prevention strategies. This process of understanding begins at the death scene, and unfortunately, the methods used by investigators had not been standardized in Indiana since 2009. This means that even agencies within the same county were collecting different information and forming different conclusions. When this troubling trend emerged, the Indiana Statewide Child Fatality Review (CFR) Program decided to focus on assisting investigators with the education and resources required to improve and standardize the process.

Taking Action (Intervention)

The Indiana (CFR) Program took action and brought SUIDI training back to Indiana. In 2015, with help from the CDC's Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant, and Rob, who agreed to become a SUIDI trainer, the following steps were taken:

- Invitations were extended to all coroners, law enforcement, Department of Child Services (DCS) offices, prosecuting attorneys, EMS and fire and local CFR team members.
- Partnerships with local businesses, professional associations and educational institutions were developed to help reduce cost and maximize funding provided at the local level.
- Five regional trainings were conducted between May and September 2015.

Impact

Thanks to the commitment of hundreds of investigators like Rob, the message about the importance of consistent, thorough case investigation was delivered.

- Representatives from 79 of the 92 counties were trained – a total of over 450 trainees!
- Over 400 SUIDI scene re-enactment dolls were provided at no cost to the agencies.
- The SUIDI instructors encouraged each attendee to share the knowledge of the protocol within their own departments.
- Training attendees got to know one another and share resources to improve investigations and ensure families receive the appropriate services during their time of greatest need.

The CFR Program, Rob and all of the dedicated investigators continue to pursue their mission of lowering

the number of infant deaths in Indiana. In the coming months, we will survey the attendees to learn what impact this training has had on their investigative processes, and help them develop protocols to sustain the SUIDI protocol at the local level. Rob and his colleagues hope that one day they will no longer have to respond to the unexpected death of an infant.

Footnotes

[1] Source: Indiana State Department of Health, Maternal & Child Epidemiology Division [December 21, 2015]

Indiana Original Source: Indiana State Department of Health, PHPC, ERC, Data Analysis Team

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Healthy People Objective

Child Fatality Review of Child Deaths Due to External Causes

PHHS Block Grant Funding

75-99% - Primary source of funding

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For more information on the

PHHS Block Grant, go to

www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant

For more information on

Healthy People, go to www.healthypeople.gov

PHHS Block Grant Supports

Indiana Healthy People Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with health objectives from [Healthy People](#).

Indiana uses its funds to address 14 health objective priorities, including

- Cardiovascular Health.
- Community Water Fluoridation.
- Accredited Public Health Agencies.
- Public Health Agency Quality Improvement Program.
- Health Improvement Plans.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to

<http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/stateHPprior.htm>.